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CHRIST'S

INFANT KINGDOM.

BY

REV. J. T. TUCKER.

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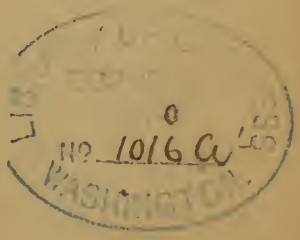

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To the Parents and Pastors of Christ's Little Ones:

I have gathered up the grain which is here ground over, from many fields of observation and reflection, through a full generation of ministerial cares and experiences; and, what I have produced in this much-wrought line of study, I offer to your kind attention. The topic is always urgent, and is gaining increased interest and acceptance in the Christian community. The conviction is deepening in serious minds, that just here is one of the pivotal points on which society is to swing around into a purer state than ours. The thoughts, now put into a brief and condensed form, may get a reading from some who would not be drawn to a longer discussion. I believe them to be true, and hope they may be helpful.

Chicopee Falls Parsonage, July, 1870.

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CHRIST'S INFANT KINGDOM.

WHAT HE SAYS OF IT.

Then were there brought unto him young children, little children, infants, that he should put his hands on them, and pray; and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But, when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.

THE GOSPELS.

MORE is contained in these ever-precious words than the implied promise, as generally understood, that young children dying

enter the heavenly world. They infold another, and, in its place, quite as important a truth, — that, through the gathering of young children into Christ's fold, the kingdom of God and of heaven is to be set up and perpetuated on this earth, as a principal agency.

"They brought unto him *their* babes," writes the evangelist Luke. This gives us the guiding clew to the way in which this work must be mostly done, especially in its earlier stages. Sacred art has caught the right idea, and beautifully set it forth; for all the painters show us the *mothers* of these little ones leading or bearing them to Jesus. No one can doubt whence comes that look of tenderest love. And who but the mother should bring the babe of her own bosom to Him who still

is saying, "Suffer the little children to come unto me"?

THE SUBJECT STATED.

The end which Christianity proposes to reach is the moral and religious salvation of society. Christ came into this world thus to make all things new.

No system of mere civilizing forces has effected or nearly approached this result. The best condition of communities has been their simplest periods, which ordinarily has been their infantile. Age has corrupted, and not improved them. Men and society have generally run down into heart-demoralization under every form of merely natural culture, however an intellectual or artistic refinement may have flourished. Such refinement has been

only on the surface, covering untold inward vice. The main tendency of Greek art, with all its exquisite grace, was immoral.

The question is seriously arresting not a few vigorous thinkers among us, whether the same thing is not threatening our own social structure, though based on at least nominally Christian principles and concessions. There are aspects of the subject involving statistics of pauperism and crime, of ignorance and brutal barbarism, on the one hand, and, at the opposite extreme, of luxurious and atheistic mammonism, which are not a little alarming.

We indeed fall back upon the sure word of prophecy to sustain our faith and hope. But, then, we must be careful not to mistake the methods of prophetic fulfilment.

The end which God proposes, and the means through which he proposes, are never to be put asunder. The latter are as imperative as the former is positive. While, therefore, we hold the assured belief of the triumph, ere long, of a true Christian civilization, it is a very grave question, always in order, whether we are mistaking the divine methods provided, and consequently alone sufficient, to secure the social salvation.

We fix, at the outset, this position, that a personal regeneration to holiness is essential to the setting-up of Christ's kingdom among men. Society has had every other kind of culture, and is not yet saved. The next, and the only adequate, change which we know of, is the penetration of its entire structure with the truth and grace of Christ.

METHODS TO EFFECT THIS.

There are two methods which may be relied on to reach this end. One, adult conversions; the other, the sanctification of children through parental and other co-operating influences.

Adult conversions must go on so long as men and women grow up having no hope, and without God in the world. But a glance at Christian and heathen lands will show the small relative gain thus made against the kingdom of sin. What length of time, yea, of uncounted ages, it might take thoroughly to Christianize our earth even by revivals of great frequency and power, one would not like to attempt to calculate. No issue lies between revival-efforts in our churches, and

the theory to be unfolded in this treatise. There will be room enough for both to put forth their utmost activity before the promised day of "the restitution of all things" shall dawn. No friend of revivals need slacken his hand in their wise and earnest promotion. But to rely mainly on this or any method of gathering the sheep into Christ's fold, while the lambs are as much neglected as they have been, is as devoid of good Christian common sense as it is of scriptural warrant.

Besides, adult conversions do not give, as a general fact, that symmetrical, consistent, solid piety, which is needed more than ever now. Too much dross is mixed with the gold; too many crooked things in temper, habits, history, to be made straight. With such materials largely

making up our church-memberships, too much labor will still be needed to keep old, easily-besetting, and long-indulged sins from usurping the dominion of the heart, and from stirring up discord, or bringing in coldness and languor, among the friends of Christ.

The Church and the world need a style of piety which shall not consume nearly so much of its power in keeping itself from backsliding and apostasy. This must be secured through infant-sanctification; by generations of the seed of the Church growing up into the fruit-bearing trees of the Lord's garden.

EARLY CONVERSIONS.

In support of this position, I adduce several considerations: —

We are entitled to look for a method of propagating true religion among men, somewhat equivalent, in manner and scope, to the way in which unholiness maintains and distributes its power among men, though in contrast, of course, with its spirit. We know how this offspring of the night and darkness lives and grows. It roots itself in the soil of human being at the very outset. Sin infects the soul. From the original act of human transgression, each individual life springing from that stock has taken a bias towards evil. An impure fountain has sent forth impure streams; not streams which will grow muddy and foul by flowing through defiling soils, but which bear outward and onward the impurities of the spring-head itself. Can a bitter fountain send out sweet waters? Can a clean

thing come from an unclean? We must measure correctly, so far as we can measure at all, the forces of earthly evil in seeking their correctives. We must suppose that God measures the whole accurately, and, as he works in grace as well as in providence through competent means, that he has intended the cure to take action upon the disease just as soon as is possible in the nature of the case.

Sin, then, marks and permeates the human race, — the world estranged from God. It sweeps down the centuries like an ocean turned into a swift descending river. Its only counteracting force at all commensurate is the consecrating power of holy character through successive generations of the regenerate, from parents to children; thus creating another great tide

of spiritual influence, which shall by and by take up and bear onward the common sentiment and life of society. In this mighty rivalry, sinfulness has the start most disastrously, by its long and universal hold on human nature. But, reasoning from the known good-will of God towards us, we must conclude that there is a way of materially reducing this odds against holiness in the earth: so we push backward the agencies of regenerative mercy into the beginnings of mortal and immortal being to avert the poison-working of depravity in its very earliest germs.

A CASE SUPPOSED.

A supposition will assist my meaning. Select a starting-point of religious influence, as when Noah came out of the ark

(eight souls in all); but that is too far away. Take, then, the landing of our pilgrim-fathers. Suppose their piety had steadily and earnestly lived in their descendants; reproducing itself, with but little exception, through the six or eight generations between them and us. Or take one family through the same time. The two who began it a half-dozen generations ago were united in the Lord. Their offspring followed their devout examples; and so, downward, the seal of the renewing Spirit has rested upon them until now; making it a Christian stock in a special sense. Does any one doubt that the grasp of original sin and of natural depravity would be greatly weakened in its hold upon that lineage, giving a thousand probabilities of continuous conversions to

Christ in its circles, over and above those of an irreligious line of descent? The case here imagined is not an unknown one altogether, and should be indefinitely multiplied.

THE INFANT HEART SUSCEPTIBLE OF GRACE.

Another consideration in support of this position is, that divine grace can more easily impress the infant than the adult heart. I use the word "infant" in the parallel terms of our Lord's words, cited at the beginning, — to signify the very early stages of human life. But I have a special eye, just here, to what we mean literally by infancy, — the period back of actual sinning, yet not of innocence as before the Fall, and of the consequent need of a renewing work of God upon it. This is my

thought, that the commencing of the sanctifying power of the Spirit of holiness in the child need not wait until sin is known and chosen by the understanding and the will.

This fact is generally conceded, and is eagerly and firmly held with respect to those who die in infant unconsciousness of evil and good. The ground of belief in their salvation is, that, through the atoning blood and gracious mediation of our Lord, they are fitted for life eternal. Fitted how, and from what, and why? Fitted by a new birth — young as they may be, out of an impure moral state, and because "by nature" they are in it, — even a state of "wrath" — for a holy heaven. If we mean any thing by infants being prepared for heaven by the Spirit of God, we must mean

as much as this. Or we have only to say that they need no work of grace in them for heavenly joys, and then we fall back on the *tabula rasa* theory; that is, that the infant soul is but a sheet of blank paper, not yet written upon in any way, —for good or evil.

But now, if God can graciously fit a child so early to die, why can he not fit it to live as well, by communicating to it, just as early, an equally effective impulse towards holiness, which it shall never lose amid all after-assaults of wickedness? Why may he not so put a young soul into the moulds of his Spirit, as that it shall no more have the imprint fade out, if continuing in the world, than if removed to heaven? Is the one continually done, and the other not possible to be done at all?

If the dying infant can be regenerated for heaven, cannot the living infant be regenerated for this world?

We are not denied this hope and trust from the Christian doctrine of the new birth, as taught by our Lord; namely, that it requires a personal repentance and faith in its subject. Certainly it does in all who are mature enough to exercise these spiritual acts. They who are of years to hear and understand preaching, or to read the Scriptures, and are not Christians, have no other gospel of salvation but this of "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ."

But shall we limit the Almighty Spirit? Shall we say, that while depravity has its full sweep upon the infant nature, according to its incipient conditions, the counter-

acting grace of the Purifier cannot breathe also over that pliant nature, awaking the first germs of a better fruitage? If we will so limit the divine work for the child that lives, why not necessarily, too, for the dying child? But what has our reasoning to do in prescribing methods and bounds to that mysterious power, the working of which is as the wind, the sound whereof is heard, but man cannot tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

We know the methods, so far forth as revelation teaches them, of God's work in minds arrived at a teachable age; but, anterior to this, no man can tell what the divine Spirit can do, has done, and waits to do on a wondrously-enlarged scale, in bringing up to that point a multitude of

these little ones touched by his gracious love, who shall never remember a time when they were converted to Christ, because their first recollections were those of praise and tender love to God and to his dear redeeming Son. Something like this is believed, if any thing is meant by the wishes, often expressed, that our children may be sanctified from their birth. It should demand very strong testimony to disprove that God may have methods of grace with the human soul, by which he can check the growth of sin in it from that early date, and go on checking it as the years go on, without in any way infringing its freedom. Nor need it disturb this persuasion that I cannot understand the mode of that gracious visitation; for I am not able to explain, even to myself, all the agen-

cy of God in saving the adult soul, while believing most fully the fact which our Lord announced to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

BIBLE-CASES OF YOUTHFUL PIETY.

It was a beautiful device of the late Prince Albert of England to erect at Windsor Castle, for the benefit of his young children, a statue of Edward VI., pointing with his royal sceptre to this verse on the page of an open sculptured Bible, "Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." But these examples are valuable,

not only as models for imitation; not only as teaching us the fact of piety beginning with the first dawn of consciousness; for beyond this they show us an important part of the human instrumentality of this fact. Take the cases of Samuel, John Baptist, and Timothy.

The case of Samuel presents these points, — a religious father and an eminently devout and godly mother; a consecration of the babe to God in most fervent prayer, even before its birth; yea more, a receiving his very existence as an answer to prayer in order that he might be consecrated to the Lord "all the days of his life;" a ratification of the vow by lending him to the Lord from earliest boyhood, in the service of the tabernacle. The phrase "lent to the Lord" may imply a contin-

ued sense of maternal responsibility, as well as solicitude for this son of many hopes. The result of all this was, that "the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor, both with the Lord, and also with men."

John Baptist was likewise the son of eminently religious parents, with the same ante-natal anxieties and spiritual preparations for a holy life; the whole power of the mother's desire having been concentrated upon his early sanctification. "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit," as the servant of the Lord, of whom he had spoken by the prophet, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

Timothy's father was a Greek, perhaps a pagan worshipper, and also a man of educated tastes. His mother and his grand-

mother were excellent Christians, of whom St. Paul wrote, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and in thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also." He was early trained in the Scriptures, which he knew the power of in a remarkably rich experience as a disciple of Jesus.

The influences which are here brought to bear on the formation of character are domestic, parental, but especially maternal. They embrace the concentration of prayer and devout feeling upon this point of infant regeneration, — the claiming (so to say) of the power of the renewing Spirit to re-create from the first that which is to be sent forth into life under the conditions of probation and redemption. They recognize

the closeness of the mother's relation to the child, as giving her the privilege, and placing her under the obligation, of a paramount agency in its early spiritual renovation. These biblical illustrations of our doctrine are not without similar corroborating cases in the religious biographies of more recent times.

As a matter of fact, the explanations of which are very obvious, far more depends, in the Christian nurture of young children, on the mother's than on the father's influence. This may be the reason, in part, why, in the providence of our loving God, so many more mothers than fathers are reached by the converting grace of Christ. Is he looking after the souls of the little ones in this dispensation of his mercy? — looking towards the fulfilment

of his own tender command, "Feed my lambs"?

Here, moreover, we have the out-cropping of the transmitted or hereditary faith, which, like a stratum of solid rock, underlaid these Scripture genealogies, — the faith "of thy mother Eunice, and thy grandmother Lois, and that is in thee also,"— not passed downward mechanically from mother to child, but as creating a powerful tendency and pressure Christward, — a drift, a current as of long running and deepening streams, or as the preparation of a rich, warm soil all ready for the reception and nourishment of the young plants of righteousness.

This is just the difference, as I apprehend it, between the effects of a continuous religious and irreligious influence in a line

of family descent, — that, in the one, the common nature (so to call it) of the family stock is like a field subjected for a long time to good tillage; not so, indeed, that weeds will not spring there profusely, if a careful cultivation be not still kept up; but it is in a good condition, comparatively, for a useful crop: while the other is just a piece of forest land, uncleared and unfenced; or some low, undrained swamp, or an old worn-out and given-up glebe, which looks like any thing rather than producing the means of life to man or beast.

POINTS THUS FAR MADE.

The progress of our argument thus far is this: the establishment of the kingdom of Christ over our world is the grand aim and end of Christianity. To rely chiefly

on adult conversions to effect this is an inadequate dependence. Christ himself says, that his kingdom is of children, little children, infants. Its hope, its reliance, must be in infant consecration and sanctification, by generations of the seed of the Church coming forward as Christian disciples. We are entitled to hold this position, because, —

1. As unholiness begins so soon to vitiate our race, it is to be expected that grace may also have a very early beginning to counteract its power.

2. Divine grace can more easily impress the infantile than the adult heart. It does effectually in them who die, to fit them for heaven. Why not, then, to fit them who do not die, to live ?

3. Scripture examples are conclusive of

the fact of early holiness through domestic piety, in the transmission of faith in God, from generation to generation, through his early regenerating grace; thus shadowing forth a mighty instrumentality of the prospective spread of true religion among men.

BIBLE-THEORY OF FAMILY LIFE.

These individual examples of youthful piety, with our previous line of thought, have opened the way to a more thorough examination of the general biblical doctrine of the subject under consideration. We shall find a clearly marked philosophy of human life, and the adaptation of specific means to give this effect, each worthy of our very careful study.

It is obvious that the populating of the earth by human beings might have been

effected as easily by successive creative acts of divine power, as its inhabitation was thus begun in the persons of the original pair. Or this might have been surrendered over to a wholly lawless and unrestrained license in the human species, as it has been in the merely animal and irresponsible orders of life.

Instead of these methods of prolonging our race, the divine Father instituted in Eden the law and covenant of marriage as the basis of the family organization, and made the continuance of mankind the sacred prerogative of this ordinance from the beginning: in defence of which constitution of domestic love and life stands one express command of the decalogue the seventh; and another, the fifth, as an additional buttress to protect its inviola-

bility. Moreover, the whole force of scriptural condemnation and promise and appeal, from first to last, moves like a unit in the interests of purity, chastity, and against every thing like promiscuous indulgence of the passions here involved. The Sermon on the Mount answers to the voice on Sinai with an intensified emphasis. The deeper we get into the clearer spiritual discernments of Christianity, and feel the invigorating, cleansing influences of its more heavenly life, this strictness of prohibition gathers a closer grasp.

Why, then, this central, most ancient feature of God's administration of our race? There should be a very commanding reason for it. There was and is. Turn to the last of the prophets before our Lord's incarnation (Mal. ii. 15): "And

did not he make one?" One married pair and fountain of the human posterity. And could not he have made more in the same way? "Yea, had he the residue of the Spirit,"—the creative energy still to work as he might determine. Then "wherefore one?" Mark the reply, "That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth." This solves the whole problem. So Calvin on this text: "He sought then the seed of God; that is, he instituted marriage, that legitimate and pure offspring might be brought forth,"—legally legitimate in order to a moral and spiritual purity. With this agrees the turning of "the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their

fathers," in the concluding verse of this prophecy, and which finds a yet fuller interpretation, as an element of Christian power, in the citation of this Scripture by St. Luke, as applicable to the forerunner of our Lord: "And he shall go before him, in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." This expresses God's original thought respecting all who should be born of the "one" whom he made in the beginning, "male and female."

If, then, that primeval "one" should have fallen through temptation into sin; yet, if repenting and amending, there was still the possibility, thenceforward, of a

faithful keeping upon the path of pious character and duty for their offspring, from age to age, through the sanctities of the family ordinance. Had that possibility become a reality, how mighty a check would soon have been laid on rebellion in the earth!

But that rebellion, in fact, took some of its earliest and most defiant strides in revolt against this very law of marriage-faith, as it has ever since nourished its godless forces at the same sensual source; Sodom being the name for uncounted centres of licentiousness from the first days of human apostasy.

THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM.

We turn another page of primitive history. While the nations of the old-world

cradle are left for a while to propagate heathenish corruption, we strike a narrower vein of divine endeavor to secure "a holy seed" in the person of Abraham, and the compact made with his household. Even Dr. Hedge admits that we here emerge upon historic ground; finding, at length, the first individual who is any thing more to us than a name (*Primeval World of Hebrew Tradition*, p. 253). Respecting the relations of God with this "father of the faithful," we have a direct and ample revelation.

God's purpose with Abraham was first national: "I will make of thee a great nation." "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth; so that, if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered." "Look now

toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them. And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be" (Gen. xii. 2; xiii. 16; xv. 5). This was the prediction and the pledge of Hebrew empire.

A second promise had a religious object. Its idea is thus unfolded: "For I know him, that he will command his children, and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. xviii. 19).

To accomplish the designs of this separation of Abraham from the idolatrous world, Jehovah entered into a specific covenant with him as a binding ordinance upon him and his posterity. "The Lord appeared unto Abram, and said unto him,

I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. . . . And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. xvii.).

The founding of a new nationality is here recorded, in order to the rescue and the preservation of the worship and service of the one true God among men. It was made with a direct regard to this, as St. Paul writes of it to the Romans, "To the

end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all [all believers] (as it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations), before him whom he believed [that is, Abraham, standing in the presence of Him whom he then and there took at his word], even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. iv.).

The whole conception of the Hebrew state was this of "a holy nation, a chosen generation, a peculiar people." And the ever-springing germ of this perpetual separation unto God was the consecration of the children into the faith of their fathers. There was no anticipation, in the

theory of this compact, of a contrary style of education. To go in this way, and not another, the child should be trained. The Mosaic Scriptures, the books of David, Solomon, and of the prophets also, are full of the thought of this transmission of the religious life of the land, as well as of its political ordinances, to future ages, — the later writings mostly in the way of stern rebuke to the people for their failure to meet the divine intention in this regard. "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." "Set your hearts unto

all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law" (Deut. vi. 6, 7; xxxii. 46). The same position is also maintained in the numerous threatenings against the want of this sense of parental responsibility, this exercise of parental care.

It is noticeable that the channel of blessings, from Abraham, the founder of the Hebrew State and Church, downward, is *domestic:* "And I will make of thee a great nation; and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing; and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee; and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 3). The promise looks alike to this, as its end and its

means. Abraham's righteousness is to bless his seed, as the families springing from his loins, and all others, shall possess his piety.

It is a blessing of piety, not of political greatness and perpetuity, here ultimately contemplated. The apostle comes again to the explanation of these ancient pledges: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations * through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations * be blessed. So, then, they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal. iii. 8, 9).

This, then, was the covenant of Jehovah, that the ancestral faith, going down as an inheritance from Abraham to his off-

* The same word in the Greek: τὰ ἔθνη.

spring, should bless them, in all their generations and families, as the chosen people of the Lord; but not that it should always be limited to this people. That plant was to be cultivated in this nursery-ground into a strength and fruitfulness which would bear the ingrafting, in after times, of shoots and scions from the wild olive of the other nations, — the outlying heathen or Gentile tribes. That tree could take these grafts, for it was not a Jewish, but essentially a Christian tree of righteousness, as St. Paul has just told us, and as Christ also intimated to the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad," — rejoiced that he should see it and its salvation as the ultimate and completed outcome of the blessing thus promised the believing patriarch.

THE SEAL OF THAT COVENANT.

The covenant with Abraham had a seal, or sign of fulfilment. No such document is executed formally, until it is signed, sealed, and recorded. "And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is my covenant, which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy seed after thee: every man-child among you shall be circumcised. And the uncircumcised man-child . . . shall be cut off from his people: he hath broken my covenant" (Gen. xvii. 9, 10, 14).

This was primarily a religious rite, and only secondarily, and by derived use, a state or civil act. It belonged to the Hebrew Church, and to the State only as re-

lated to this, according to the theocratic constitution. St. Paul to the Romans writes, "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith." And to the Colossians he explains its meaning as "the putting-off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Thus Lange on Gen. xvii. 10: that circumcision "should be the symbol of the new birth, i.e., of the sanctification of human nature from its very source and origin, is shown both by the passages which speak of the circumcision of the heart . . . and from the manner of speech in use among the Israelites, in which Jewish proselytes were described as new born." Its value was (*a*) to keep God's covenant with them continually and vividly in mind, and (*b*) to secure God's grace

to them as they should thus avail themselves of it in his own appointed way. It was not the introduction of a rite in use among neighboring nations for sanitary purposes, though, within a very restricted circle, it may have been practised by others.* It was a specific sign or seal of God's living and abiding power and presence to preserve a holy seed in Israel according to the election of his grace, in the keeping of his commandments; and it was to be virtually perpetual, as ever bearing witness to the same covenant of God with man, and as a source of holy influence on the earth.

Therefore, when that wonderful sermon was preached at Pentecost to thousands of Jews gathered from every land, the apos-

* Smith's Bible Dictionary; "Circumcision."

tle closed up his invitation to them to enter the Christian fold with these thoroughly Jewish words: "For the promise is unto you and unto your children." What promise? Jehovah's to Abraham. What promising? A godly seed. "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles," — those "afar off". . . whom "the Lord our God shall call". . . "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Acts ii. 39; Gal. iii. 14).

We are, consequently, in precisely the same line of the divine plan and working now, as were those elder brethren of ours, with respect to family piety and household consecration to God, and with respect, moreover, to the means of drawing out of the divine covenant its intended grace. We have that covenant, and its

seal also, and the Holy Spirit of Christ, to fulfil to us, in our children, the promised inheritance of righteousness. That promise is "unto us and to our children" as fully, to say the least, as it was to any Israelite.

BAPTISM IN CHRIST'S INFANT KINGDOM.

Planting ourselves at the opening of the Christian era, this is obvious, — that no son of Abraham after the flesh would have ever looked at the Christian Church as a spiritual home, if he could not have brought his offspring with him into the same fold. They had dwelt together in the Hebrew fold for as long a period before Christ's coming as we live after that event. Our Saviour's words — "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come

unto me" — were in full accord with the religious habit of his countrymen's thoughts and life. These little ones, too, belonged to his kingdom on earth as well as in the heavens. He did not design to have them left outside of his Church, while their parents are sheltered there. A Jew would have felt this to be unnatural and cruel. Should a Christian think it kind? Infants have a mark of the Good Shepherd to receive now as always. They are to be taken into the enclosures of his sheep. "Feed my lambs" is his charge to his pastors. Feed them where? By the roadside? Or not rather inside the fold, the Church?

The question is not, Where is infant baptism commanded? but, where is it repealed?

The form is changeable, unessential. The fact is one and permanent. Infant consecration to the Lord by a visible religious act has stood on the statute-book of divine enactments since Jehovah made the covenant of his grace, in Christ, with the father of his believing and obedient Church. Then was its Christian significance and power established in reality, if not in name; and its observance was sacredly bound on all the children of that friend of God forever. If not, where was its repealing act so hidden that no New-Testament writer could find it?

I almost fancy that I see the reader smiling at the above phrase of the "Christian significance and power" of an ordinance which has fallen so largely out of the observance of too many of our churches.

Just here is one of the places where it is so hard to walk by faith, and not by sight, — so hard for gospel-disciples to imitate Abraham four thousand years ago. "And Abraham believed God; and it was counted to him for righteousness." "And Abraham took Ishmael, his son, and all that were born in his house, and circumcised them the selfsame day, as God had said unto him." What good could that do them? asks some doubting Thomas.

It put God's mark of ownership on them, that they were his. It obeyed God's direction, who is best qualified to arrange the channels through which his heavenly power shall reach human hearts. It pledged the parental head of the household most solemnly to personal holiness in their own behalf, as the presiding authority

and guide of the family, and as the medium of a sanctifying influence to the offspring given to them in the Lord. It did not itself confer grace unto salvation; for Ishmael roved off into paganism. Nor does the preaching of the gospel save all or any who hear it, as a merely human utterance; yet it is not to be given up.

Infant baptism has been perverted into a sacramental regeneration; thus defeating its sanctifying power, and raising up violent opposition against the usage. But adult baptism has been the occasion of equally gross superstition. There are immersionists who insist, that, in and by the act of submersion in water, sin is supplanted by holiness, and the subject passes into the state of grace. The dogma of adult baptismal regeneration has as firm a

hold in corrupt churches as that of the cleansing away of infantile pollution in baptismal water. Grave perversions of adult baptismal efficacy were of early origin. The narrative of the baptism of Constantine the Great, in Stanley's "Eastern Church" (pp. 314, 315), is an illustration in point. After twenty-five years of a nominally Christian confession, during which period he "had been considered by Christian bishops an inspired oracle and apostle of Christian wisdom, . . . had opened the first general council of the Church, . . . had joined in the deepest discussions of theology, . . . had preached to rapt audiences," on his death-bed, this powerful head of Christendom received this ordinance; having thus delayed under the superstitious notion that in it was to be

secured "a complete obliteration and expiation of all former sins." But such perversions of the sacrament of adult baptism are not accepted as valid objections to its practice. The Lord's supper has likewise been perverted into a Popish mass; thus utterly changing its nature, and degrading its sanctity. But this proves nothing but the folly of its corrupters. Any means of spiritual grace can be turned into the same kind of sacramental machinery. Most of these have been so turned. Yet that furnishes not the smallest reason against their proper and legitimate use.

The question is this: Has the wisdom of our loving Father, from the founding of the Church upon the promise of Christ in the household of Abraham, recognized

the consecration of children to God, in parental faith, as a means of securing to such children the renewing grace of his Spirit? I affirm it on the scriptural authority now set forth. It is a divine ordination, and is no more to stand at the bar of our judgment, to pass on its fitness to such an end, than is any thing else which God has ordained for this or any other purpose, and which he has, as here, never repealed or countermanded. But, in its Christian form, this ordinance has a freer usage than before, according to the nature and spirit of the new dispensation, which is richer and ampler in its applications than its forerunner. All have the privilege of it, as St. Paul tells the Galatians: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ's," mark the linking backward and forward, "then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. iii. 27–29). We go to ruin, so we confess, if we slide from the original covenant of faith. Then why not hold to the whole of it as well as a part? Did God put more into that covenant than was needed? No.

"The words of his extensive love
From age to age endure:
The angel of the covenant proves,
And seals the blessings sure.

"Jesus the ancient faith confirms
To our great fathers given:
He takes young children in his arms,
And calls them heirs of heaven."

BAPTIZED CHILDREN AND THE CHURCH.

The baptized children of the Church are related to it as probationers for full membership when they shall give credible evidence of personal regeneration. This should be early expected. They should be under its careful instruction as the lambs of Christ's flock; should be taught from their first intelligent days that they are his by parental consecration. To give our children thus to the Lord, and then to turn them adrift to rove as fugitives wherever temptation may lure them, is as unchristian as to unite ourselves to his Church, and then to fall back into any kind of worldly inconsistency. Our Congregationalism needs some definitely accepted system of juvenile care and education, more di-

rect and spiritual than the Sabbath school furnishes, to prepare its baptized youth for church-communion, — something like that which, among our Methodist brethren, organizes all this portion of the young into classes, under suitable leaders, as candidates for full church-relations. Or, pastors should take this work into their own charge as a regular part of their ministerial duty, as in the Lutheran and the Episcopal Churches; from which we need not decline to receive a help like this, for fear of lapsing into an undue formalism. The church which baptizes its children is bound to assume the responsibility of their oversight in conjunction with parental watchfulness, and as a stimulus to this which is apt to be neglected. To deny that an infant baptized into the name of Jesus is a part of his

Church, in the measure above indicated, is certainly to reduce the act to a very unmeaning form. Yet this is often virtually done.

WHY THIS ORDINANCE IS SO MUCH NEGLECTED IN OUR CHURCHES.

One cause has been the lack of a clear conception of the truth just noticed. It has not been perceived, and consequently not felt, how this dedication of children to the Lord should and does affect their relation to Christ and his Church. Hence it has grown to have little significance, and to be widely neglected. Another cause has powerfully worked to the same end. Our civil institutions, and our whole national life, have, from the days of Plymouth Rock, been constantly developing

a spirit of individual responsibility, which is making itself injuriously felt in at least some directions. Our theory of secular duty and rights is, that every one is a free and independent citizen, responsible to no one but God and his own conscience. We have nothing hereditary among us save by personal will. People are units; every one beginning and ending his own history inside his individual record. This tendency has received impulse from our very natural dislike of the political and ecclesiastical systems, against which our Church and State are alike a protest, until we are in danger of running far beyond the limits of discretion, in what in its place is indispensable to a true manhood and a free commonwealth.

How is this influence operating here?

In the outer circles of a professed respect for general Christianity, that is, among very liberal Christians so called, it has taken the ground to let children grow up without any creed-instruction one way or another; so that, when they get old enough to believe any thing or nothing, they can take their choice, — be Christians or Pagans in their own right, as they please: and this so as not to abridge their natural liberty; or, as Dr. Holmes once told us in an "Atlantic Monthly," so as not to make them "Flathead Indians," as that eminent naturalist avers most ministers' children, and, by inference, most of their docile flock who feed in evangelic pastures, unhappily are.

Inside the Christian circle itself, this exaggerated individualism shifts off responsi-

bility from itself by the covert plea, that, as each one must answer for his own soul before God, each one should look out for his own salvation, without expecting too much help and sympathy from others. Hence a very common indifference to the impenitent outside the Church, and a lack of hearty fellowship and love within its enclosures.

But, worse than this, it actually turns the hearts of parents away from instead of to their offspring, by weakening down almost to nothing the conviction of parental obligation for their salvation. Thus they are turned over to the hope of a conversion to Christ, no one can tell when, — in some religious revival; or, if worst comes to worst, on a dying-bed. Let the question reach you, parents of unregenerate chil-

dren, whether your hope has steadily rested on the sanctification of your offspring in early childhood, as God's blessing on your covenant-keeping piety; or not rather on their conversion by and by through Sabbath-school agencies or revival-pressures. Do you remember your fault to day?

Hence, again, this notion of independent action has kept back multitudes of our little ones from Christ in the sacrament of baptism.

It is not for want of Scripture-texts to command it. There is not one word of the Lord which specifically tells us to keep the first day of the week as our day of the Lord. Still we do it, as our fathers did, from his resurrection; and this because the Jews had a Sabbath; and we reason rightly here, that a Christian should have at

least as much of religious privilege as an Israelite. The change of time from one day to the next makes no difference: why, then, should the baptismal change of a mere outward form in the consecrating act of children to God make any more difference?

It would not, but for this fiction of individual rights. It never has in countries of Christendom where society is organized on a less personal theory. We have let our American feeling in this matter (for such it unquestionably is) bias overmuch our religious convictions. We have let our political ideas run over into our Christian practice; and we think it as unreasonable to baptize our children unto God in faith that they shall grow up citizens of his kingdom, as it would be for us to pledge their adhe-

sion, in advance, to some party in the State.

And so we are often told by believing parents, that they would not object to bring their little ones to the baptismal font, provided the act might be repeated in after life, should these sons and daughters then desire it; for it looks like depriving them of a right to give themselves thus to Christ, if this dedicating act is now done, once for all, in their behalf in their unconscious or youthful days. And these very parents, baptized in their infancy, have perhaps felt (they have said so) that they were forestalled in a privilege which they wish had been reserved for their own personal enjoyment.

But this idea of individual privilege and right thus carried out is an altogether

extravagant assumption. While it is true, so far as adult duty goes, as enforcing repentance, and belief in Christ, and the working-out of salvation in earnest, personal diligence, because each one must stand or fall to his own Master, it is just the reverse of true or biblical with regard to the relation of Christian parents to their offspring. It is not natural; for we are continually taking grave responsibilties in their behalf, because we ought to, and cannot avoid it. We do it in many secular interests without a question of its propriety. We should be most censurable if we did it not. It is just as right and obligatory in religious concerns. God has made us parents for this very purpose.

THE ARGUMENT CONCLUDED.

This, then, is the sum of the argument. The Author of grace and redemption has made a perpetual covenant with his church of believing disciples, which covenant of salvation is "to us and to our children" in all generations. It has ever had a seal which he affixed to it, and has never removed; the pattern of it only having been changed under providential sanctions. It is a mark of Christ's flock, — the sheep and the lambs alike. Its purpose is to bind human souls to God and holiness; to perpetuate this consecration by a visible as well as spiritual ratification of vows from parents to their offspring; to be a household bond of faith and love and hope; to secure, in a word, a Christian

posterity from a Christian stock. So far from being a trifling, unimportant, unscriptural ceremony, this bringing young children to Christ in baptism is to be regarded as the direct path to their introduction into his kingdom of grace. I do not say that the heart is renewed in this ordinance; certainly it cannot be renewed by it: nor that an unbaptized child dying is not saved. God does not so restrict his mercy, nor visit on us the consequences of unfaithfulness to his methods for its bestowment. So, in riper years, the unbaptized, as well as others, are converted. But the multitudes of these in Christian families, as elsewhere, who need conversion, is a weighty proof that we can have no general household piety passing down from generation to generation, taking up

the newborn souls, and bringing them from the first stages of life under the grace of the renovating Spirit, thus shaping them in their earliest mould for piety, Christ, and heaven, until this doctrine and this ordinance of infant-consecration are restored to the household and to the Church as the seal and sign of a living faith in Christ, and covenant with him, by his help, to devote every child given to parental love to him as his own rightful property, and then to train it up as a Christian child "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

CHILDREN IN A CHRISTIAN HOME.

The practical details of this training and nurture, to which the remaining pages must be given, is not the easiest part of this

subject. It is less difficult to prove a truth by argument than to put it into working order. Then, again, the fair working of this truth demands an already confirmed religious character in the family growth as a preparation for its full effectiveness; that is, the sanctification of the rising race is to be looked for in the line of a Christian family stock running backward long enough to furnish an accumulated power of grace, and to insure the inheritance of covenant mercies according to the biblical doctrine of a "godly seed" now stated. And, more disheartening than all, we have to meet at the threshold of our practical suggestions and appeals a disbelief, in many Christian parents, that God has any plan of this kind concerning the children of his peo-

ple. Further: they feel a sense of discouragement about their offspring's salvation, because of past neglect. And, in parents just coming under these responsibilities, there is too often a lack of steady purpose to begin and continue their domestic life in the right way. These obstacles, however, only increase the need of a careful and faithful dealing with parental consciences and hearts.

To bring our children to Christ as the rule, and not the exception, of their condition, leads me to remark, first, upon

THE SPIRIT OF THE HOME-LIFE.

We have seen that the family was organized as God's sacred institution to perpetuate holiness among men; antedating the church, the ministry, the priest-

hood, the Sunday school, — itself God's primeval church and ministry of grace.

This design of the household, therefore, shows what should be its spirit. It should be thoroughly Christian in that bright and summer-like glow of a cheerful piety which no more needs a label to tell us what it is than does the sunshine of a June morning.

I cannot do even physiological justice to this part of the subject, without here saying, that this Christian sunshine is an important preparation for maternal cares. Children should be anticipated and accepted as a blessing from the Lord. The contrary habit of feeling is one of the particularly bad symptoms of a civilization too corrupt and selfish and debilitated to meet the proper duties of humanity.

To regard a family offspring as a troublesome interference with other business or pleasure, to fret and worry about these burdens, is enough to poison beforehand the life of a child, as it also shows a lack of trust in the divine providence, and of acquiescence in the divine plans, which quite unfit that parent to be the conveyer of a holy nurture to the young spirit in her keeping. Mothers should know that their Christian duties begin before God puts these little ones into their arms. It were a false modesty to hide a thought so vital to this subject.

The spirit of a home which shall be a safe place for a young immortal should show a steady control of religious considerations in its common life. We very well know what is meant by the temper of a family,

as peaceful or quarrelsome, or selfish or benevolent, or vain or ambitious or frivolous or slanderous, or devoutly Christian. That is the atmosphere, whatever it be, which the members of that home-circle are daily breathing. The children absorb it at every pore, and are nourished or poisoned by it. It impresses infancy with its forces, in tones of the voice, expressions of the familiar faces, and the keynote of the continual routine of work and play. It is a mistake which indolence or petulance often tries to believe, that very young children are not much impressed by surrounding things. So far from this is the fact, that the first five years, which are years mostly of mere external impressions from domestic scenes, do actually set the growth of most children in a way that

is never constitutionally changed even by converting grace.

Your child is not a month old before it begins to be impressed, favorably or unfavorably, by your way of handling it, speaking to it, using it. It lies on its mother's lap a babe without the power of speech; but her countenance is the book from which that infant mind reads its first lessons of feeling and thought, — an illustrated page beaming with smiles and peacefulness, or roughened with frowns, defaced by fretfulness and passion. It cannot speak; but its ear is quick to catch the gentle tones of affection, or the sharp explosions of impatience: and, if its understanding be not old enough to tell in what they differ, its heart knows well enough that they are as unlike as light and dark-

ness. Then come the questions of right and wrong, which, in a few years, will be asked and answered, — answered, not in words only or chiefly, but in the conduct and bearing of every-day life. That child is learning its commandments out of your temper and behavior. It is getting its sense of obligation from what it sees is your code of truth and duty. You are educating its conscience to a delicate sensitiveness, or to a dull, heavy sluggishness. The first time it fairly knows that a parent is doing, speaking, or feeling wrongly, is like twisting a tender nursery-twig into a crooked stick, and tying it there. O lamentable twist!

The parent is to that child in the place of God. How faultless, then, should that parent be! Parental goodness, kindness,

calmness, truthfulness, justice, should be to the young child its best revelation of God's fatherly excellence and love. Children do get their earliest impressions of God from the parental character. What should that be? What is it?

The spirit of the home as thus demanded is not the product of what are called easy circumstances, nor need it be prevented by narrow and straitened conditions in life. It is impossible to say that the former are, on the whole, better adapted to secure it than the latter. It is the product of God's daily grace in hearts which realize, and love to remember, that they live to be a vital link between God and the souls which he has given to their direct forming influence. It is a holy spirit within them, strong and steady,

and heavenly enough, to repress all efforts for mere show and rivalry in dress, furnishings, style, as an object of ambitious desire; to check, before spoken, every word of detraction and ill-will; to subject the anxieties of life as to food and raiment, and secular getting-on in the world, to a hopeful trust in an ever present and loving God; thus keeping hushed the voice of repining and murmuring, of "fretting against the Lord," or, what is the same thing, against the orderings of fortune and misfortune. It is plain that we are concerned here with a host of "little things," which only a soul habitually at peace with itself, and raised above the world by union with Christ, can properly adjust. Very likely you are tempted to say, "This is beautiful, but impossible." That unbe-

lief will doubtless make it so to you; but it is not impossible. It has been and is an actual, if not an absolutely perfect, attainment in circumstances as difficult as yours can be. It is only requiring, that, while "not slothful in business," in doors or out, you be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;" and that thus your children shall draw their first breath, and their daily breath, in a home of love and cheerfulness and contentment, and faith in God, and benevolent sympathies, and kind words, and heavenly aspirations.

CHILDHOOD'S LONG DEPENDENCE ON PARENTAL CARE.

What, but to give parental influence time to mould the young, is the reason that it takes a dozen years or more to

bring a boy or girl forward to the same amount of physical, self-sustaining vigor which is reached by most animals in a single year? Some writers have set this down as a point of inferiority in the human race, compared with the lower races, that they are so soon able to cast off this oversight, while we must depend on it for a long period. But suppose that we needed to remain at home no longer than the brood of birds in their nest, or the young of the flocks and herds, where would be the opportunity to transmit character from sire to son? To some, in truth, it would be a mercy, could they dispense with the care of those who brought them into this world, as early as the brute which perishes can do without its mother. And so it might have been

in all cases of human birth so far as our bodily make is concerned. We could have been endowed with strength and instinct enough for this speedy self-protection, had this been all. But the whole arrangement for the propagation of mankind contemplated these facts, — that parents should be worthy to transfer by home-nurture their moral likeness to their offspring, and should have years enough of slow and gentle and most confidential intercourse with them, and influence over them, in which effectually to do it. This was the original family-idea; nor has the outbreak of sin among men altered any thing of the intention of the family, — its laws and obligations.

HOME GOVERNMENT.

There will not be need for much of this if the home spirit is right; or, rather, it will be a government which will so justify its goodness, even in severity, that it will be accepted cheerfully as just and kind.

But we must not be betrayed into ideal speculations. These children, even if under the moulding of the Divine Spirit, are still but children, unripe in wisdom, experience, self-knowledge, imperfect and sinful. If grown-up Christians need government, young Christians also need it; and young aliens from Christ need it yet more.

Authority is vested in parental hands. It is to be asserted, maintained, used, in family administration. To discard it, and

to attempt to supply its place with other suasions, is to run against divine teachings and true philosophy. Yet while authority is to be felt in the home as the pervading presence of its very life, — its foundation under it, and its roof over it, — it should be so manifestly a Christian authority, that it will no more be disputed by the young wills and consciences there than is the dominion of God over all right natures. It is the authority of the heavenly Father delegated to the family head: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord; for this is right."

There is no necessary connection between authority and harshness; no opposition between steady and even stern government, and the spirit of love. It is a slander on love to call it blind. It is a poor sort of

love which has no eyes to see peril and wrong, and no hand to hold back, with the infliction (if need be) of present pain, the inexperienced and the endangered. The love of God is no such soft and easy and nerveless a thing as that. Fear and punishment have their proper place in his administration. They will be wanted within call in the most Christian house. Yet they are not to be called in, except in the last resort; but they are to be known as lying back among the resources of domestic discipline, — a real fact to fall back upon when absolutely required as the ultimate defence of the parental supremacy. And being thus known, even as we know that the Almighty Father, with all his tender-heartedness, has a rod and a scourge always within reach, they will only the more demonstrate

how worthy is that human parent of the profoundest respect and affection.

The ideal conception of government, like every thing else in a Christian home, should be as a means of holy nurture. Its end is not just to have this or that order obeyed, but to form a spirit of obedience, a subjection of the will to that which is right.

Hence all commands and wishes should be conscientiously right; and they should be expressed in a right temper, with no blustering agitation or heated menace. And if, unhappily, they involve the enforcement of punishment (as very seldom they should need to), this is to be inflicted in the most tender, prayerful, Christian temper of all.

Commands should be thoughtfully and rightly given, then never recalled or evad-

ed: but they should be carried through, slowly if best, but surely; without chastisement, if possible to avoid it; but if this becomes necessary, then time and place (always alone) are to be wisely selected. And never begin severely, but gently, yet firmly, watching most carefully the effect; pausing to mark it, to put in kind and winning words, to hold your own temper in most complete control: but never dismiss the case until you have good evidence that the will of your child has sincerely submitted to your own.

You see the delicacy of this matter of the home government: it forbids a rough, exacting, teazing, spasmodic management of children, — all sugar one hour, and all vinegar for a good many more than the next. It looks to a subdual of the will,

not a breaking of it (there is a world-wide difference here). We want men and women of unbending wills, but not of stubborn wilfulness. Family government in all its processes looks to a cheerful submission of the will to duty, to right, to holiness, to Christ: it must not rest in any end short of this. If it does, it fails of its Christian office. If it be merely a trial of strength between parent and child, of cunning, of persistence, or any thing of this kind, you will gain no real mastery of that child: you will educate it into a hypocrite or a stouter rebel. If, on the contrary, your child sees, from its earliest perceptions, that you are using your parental authority in the same spirit, and for the same ends, that you pray in your houshold, and fill it with the sunlight of your Chris-

tian love and grace, it will be a short struggle, if any, which you will have, to bring every loving heart in that charmed circle into habitual dutifulness to you as put by God over that circle of young hearts to connect it with the family of the Lord in heaven. Does this require much grace? Certainly. But does it require any more than every Christian should have, may have, — may daily exercise?

CASES OF HOME DISCIPLINE.

One or two examples of correction will illustrate the importance of not yielding until the will of the child is subdued.

A little girl between two and three years of age had manifested, one morning, a peculiarly unlovely and refractory spirit. Being the first-born of that family, it was

felt to be especially needful thoroughly to settle the principle of obedience in her case. The father — a clergyman — laid aside his usual work, took his daughter alone to a chamber, explained to her as clearly as he could wherein she was wrong, and told her kindly, but firmly, that neither would leave the room until he was satisfied of her sincere repentance, and surrender to his will. Hours passed before that point was reached; but reached it was, at last (and that without any other chastisement), in a tearful, heart-broken, intelligent giving-up of that young rebellion. It was a severely painful trial to more than two hearts in that house; but it never had to be repeated. It broke up the business-arrangements of a day; but it saved hours and days of after trouble. It placed upon

a thousand subsequent acts and feelings the seal of an easy submission to parental government. That little girl gave good evidence of Christian character before she ceased to be a little girl.

A second example. The son of another clergyman, scarcely beyond infantile years, came up to his father's study-table, and taking up his watch by the chain, which was hanging within his reach, retreated to the other side of the room. The father called him to bring it back. The boy would not obey. The father, holding out his hand, bade him put the watch in it. Still he refused. Again and again he was bidden to do it. At length the child reluctantly began to come towards the table. The struggle against submission was giving way under the steady eye of the father,

until the half-yielding boy held the watch directly over his parent's hand. Still the order was to place it therein. But, while yet for a moment the hesitating boy debated the point of doing as he was told, the father hastily caught the watch from his grasp. The child had conquered. He felt it; and that father felt it, and years after he said, that, from that unfortunate day, he never had evidence of a hearty yielding of that boy's will to his on a debated point. A superficial obedience was the most which he could secure. Do you say that a thing like that is a mere trifle? So is the hinge that swings the massive gate of a city; so is the spark which explodes a magazine. The smallest divergence from a right line, if followed out, will by and by make an immense and an immeasurable divergence.

HOME TEACHING AND DEVOTION.

I join these together, because religious instruction should always be saturated with devout feeling. If it ever is dry, hard, repulsive to the young, the reason is, that it is attempted as head-work and will-work, without much, if any, heart in it. Children, above all others, are to be reached through the affections.

Family religious teaching should not be set off by itself as a thing apart from all other interests. It should not be confined to the Lord's Day, nor to any set way of inculcation. It should blend itself with the other interests of life, and flow in naturally and freely with the stream of daily thought and conversation. There should be nothing forced or sanctimonious in deal-

ing religiously with childhood. Young minds are quick to detect pretences: they catch by intuition the motive and feeling of others. If they see that you bring them up to a lesson of this sort because the time has come, and you think you ought to, you will only disgust them with the whole subject of Christian truth and devotion.

Religious conversation should be easy and spontaneous in a religious home, — the most so of any conversation in it. It should readily start from a hundred things suggesting the care and love of God, the purity and the sympathy of Jesus, the spiritual value of life, the expected blessedness of heaven.

The religious lessons of childhood should follow, as a rule, the capacity of its years. The Bible is its great storehouse; and

surely, for the beginnings of this instruction, the narratives of both Testaments are just the subjects adapted to interest and benefit the opening mind. Children never weary of Scripture stories; and nothing can take the place of these as a power over the young spirit to mould it aright. No one will question that the teaching given should, for the most part, be within the child's comprehension. Yet I dissent from the opinion, that there should be no lessons given beyond this limit; for we all have to learn many such lessons as long as we live. Why, then, should not the young begin to do so? This, too, is absolutely necessary in order to cultivate the principle and habit of faith. Christ's rule is not, believe only what you can see, but blessed is he, who, not seeing, still believes.

This rule is as good for the first years of life as for the last. And let this be noted, that scepticism has increased in the world just as this modern notion has gained sway, that you must teach children nothing but what they can understand about God and Christ, and the soul and religion. Imbibing this fallacy in childhood, they most naturally demand to carry it out in after-years: and it will carry them out to half-way or utter infidelity. It is a proud ambition which can never give the repose of heart which we all need. It shuts off heaven from the soul as completely as the brass slide kept closed at the end of a telescope will shut from the eye the splendors of the starry sky.

Consequently, while making the easy portions of the Bible the staple of Chris-

tian teaching in the family, this instruction should be judiciously strengthened with a simple statement of the fundamental doctrines of redemption, as also being revealed facts to be learned and remembered; with little or no attempts to explain them further than can be easily followed. They are to be received on trust until they shall be more fully understood.

For eighteen hundred years, the Church relied on catechetical instruction as a necessary part of the Christian training of its youth. Within fifty years, this has been decried as unphilosophical, irrational, antiquated, oppressive. Whence this cry? From the camp of the sceptics and that wing of the Christian communion which lies nearest them. This kind of teaching should be restored in our families and

churches, but in a simpler form than that in which it used to be given. One of our pressing denominational wants is a catechism for the young, which shall be more devotional than dogmatic in its character, dealing less with sharply-cut definitions for the intellect, and more with living and moving appeals to the heart. Such a help to domestic and pastoral instruction would be warmly welcomed in hundreds of our homes.

What other aids to this instruction may be used should be cautiously selected by parents and teachers, whether in the form of religious newspapers for the young or for older readers; for the children will not be content without a sight of what their elders read. In the department of religious biographies, and particularly of religious

novels, this care should be constant and close; and, if it was, the numbers of these books would undergo a rapid and large diminution. If nine out of every dozen of the last-named volumes could be turned again into blank paper, the moral and spiritual dangers of our young people would be immensely lessened.

PARENTS CANNOT DELEGATE THIS WORK.

This office of instruction cannot be turned over by parents to other hands. It inheres in the family constitution as much as nursing and feeding and clothing your offspring. It would be no stranger for you to send your children out to your neighbors for these cares than to rely, for example, on the Sabbath school for their Christian education. Here is a fearful neglect of

parental duty and privilege. Thousands of our church-members have actually consigned this grave matter to Sabbath-school teachers, who may or may not be competent to such a work, — many of them not fathers or mothers themselves, and with no personal consciousness, therefore, of parental solicitudes. But if they are, and if they were most competent to this duty, they are not these children's parents, and as such will never have to answer for these children's souls.

The Sabbath school has its important work to do. It may greatly aid the work of the Christian parent. It has a special and wide field of labor among the irreligious families and masses of Christendom. And the Church should also sustain it by its presence and influence to give it stand-

ing and power, as much as it sustains the public and social worship of God. But the Sabbath school must not foster, without a constant protest, parental negligence and unfaithfulness. Parents can turn it to their help every week, by making it a point to look after the preparations of their children for the school-lesson, and then following up its labors with their own additional counsels and prayers.

The daily worship of God in the assembled household is a power for holiness which no faithful and consistent Christian will neglect. It lies very close to the fulfilment of this gracious promise of the Lord: "I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." A short selection of Scripture; a brief, natural, and loving prayer; a familiar

hymn of adoration, gratitude and trust, — these acts of devotion will not weary or disgust the youngest child. A simple, humble, fervent worship thus maintained, and inwoven with the first impressions of life, is one of the most undying of influences which the human heart receives.

So should the infant tongue be taught itself to pray, and to sing hymns of praise to Christ for his redeeming love. A Christian's child should be taught from the beginning that he or she is Christ's; that they were made for him; that they have been solemnly dedicated to him in baptism according to the eternal covenant of faith; that they are more his children, by every right and bond, than they are ours. This idea should be a constant presence with them, — that they are to grow up in the

flock of the Good Shepherd as his lambs, his sheep, made his by regenerating grace; that they are the very ones whom he meant, and now means, when he said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God."

I bring these pages to a close with an earnest appeal to the fathers and mothers who may read them to take the truths now set forth into good and honest hearts. If there be a motive to draw a Christian parent closer to God, and a motive to draw an unchristian parent to Christ in a sincere conversion to his service, these children of yours are these motives, whom you should be leading with you every day heavenward. The parental tie is the most sacred thing on earth. God winds it

around hearts here to make, through it, a circle of love and worship beyond this life. It is the channel along which he would pour the tides of holiness over this earth. Thus are the nations to be saved. The family is to fill the Church; the Church is to fill the world.

"Give, then, O Lord, thy holy Spirit to these little ones, that they may be born again, and be made heirs of everlasting salvation: through our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the holy Spirit, now and forever. *Amen.*"

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